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Addressing an Aged Generation: Preaching the Gospel in the Context of Demographic Change in Western Europe

Helge Stadelmann

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Überlegungen zu christlichem Gottesdienst und Predigt werden der Tatsache Rechnung tragen müssen, dass die Menschen, welche die Kirche oder Gemeinde ansprechen will, von ganz unterschiedlichen Lebensgegebenheiten betroffen sind. Das bedeutet in unserer alternden Gesellschaft in Westeuropa, dass die praktische Theologie die zunehmende Zahl älterer Personen berücksichtigen muss, welche die christliche Botschaft ansprechen soll. Der vorliegende Artikel skizziert einige der Prozesse, die

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RÉSUMÉ

La réflexion sur le culte chrétien et la prédication doit prendre en compte le fait que l'auditoire de l'Église souffre des diverses vulnérabilités de la vie. Dans nos sociétés d'Europe occidentale vieillissantes, cela signifie que la théologie pratique doit considérer les besoins du nombre croissant de personnes âgées auxquelles on doit communiquer le message chrétien. L'auteur fait état de certaines évolutions qui interviennent alors que l'on avance en âge

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SUMMARY

Reflection on Christian worship and preaching will have to take into account the fact that the people whom the Church is addressing suffer from the varied vulnerabilities of life. In our aging Western European societies this means that Practical Theology will have to consider the growing number of elderly persons whom the Christian message has to address. This article mentions some of the develop-

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1. Introduction

The demographic drift which is exhibited in the aging of contemporary society will pose a tremendous challenge for conducting Christian worship services, and in particular for preaching, during the coming years. This challenge will require a partial

im fortgeschrittenen Lebensalter stattfinden, und erörtert, welche Bedeutung das Altern einer Gesellschaft für Kontext, Inhalt und Form einer Predigt hat. Er unterscheidet zwischen jüngeren Senioren (65 bis 80 Jahre) und Senioren im hohen Alter (über 80 Jahre) und macht sich daran, eine „seniorengerechte“ Homiletik und Liturgie zu entwickeln. Der Autor schlägt unter anderem vor, integrative Gottesdienste anzubieten, die Menschen aus unterschiedlichen Generationen ansprechen, ohne dass darüber die speziellen Bedürfnisse von Senioren vernachlässigt werden.

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et réfléchit aux implications du vieillissement de la société pour le contexte, le contenu et la forme des prédications. Il distingue les seniors les plus jeunes (de 65 à 80 ans) des personnes de grand âge (à partir de 80 ans) et ébauche une conception de la pratique homilétique et liturgique adaptée aux seniors. Entre autres, il suggère de viser à faire des cultes qui intègrent les différentes générations en s'adaptant à celles-ci sans négliger les besoins des personnes âgées.

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ments that take place in later life and reflects on what the aging of society means for the context, content and form of the sermon. It distinguishes between younger seniors (65-80 years old) and people of high age (those over 80) and it begins to develop a 'senior-sensitive' homiletics and liturgy. Among other things, the author suggests holding integrative services which accommodate people of different generations, without neglecting the needs of seniors.

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reorientation of our present culture of Christian worship. In recent decades popular youth culture has reformed church worship in evangelical and charismatic 'free' churches, resulting in lengthy pop-music blocks of 'Praise and Worship' which are usually 'performed' to a standing audience, as

well as 'messages' delivered in postmodern jargon that address practical issues of the younger crowd. The fact that there will be a growing number of seniors within Christian circles requires a serious discussion of liturgical forms as well as aspects of material and formal homiletics if the Church is not to neglect their needs and interests. The present essay focuses on the challenges and opportunities that result from the demographic changes which are now evident. It casts light on the options available for sermon preparation and delivery within the context of multi-generational church worship.

2. The fragility of life as a topic for liturgy and sermon

Human suffering and weakness have not always been prominent themes in Christian liturgy. It seems that praise and worship fit together more naturally than worship and lament. As Timothy Pierce puts it, the very place where people 'ought to be able to bring their grief and struggles has become the one place where it is improper to show sadness'.¹ Christian liturgy does not seem to be the right stage for the vulnerabilities of life.

This situation is quite contrary to worship in biblical times. New Testament writings like the Epistles of James, 1 Peter and Hebrews, which were to be read in church, clearly speak of sufferings and afflictions as Christian experiences. Old Testament worship without individual and communal lament can hardly be envisioned, as has been shown in-depth exegetically.² But such studies on the topic of the manifold expressions of human suffering in divine service yet have to bear fruit in liturgical studies.³ Naming the realities of human weakness and vulnerability needs to become a regular part of Christian worship so that suffering people will experience that compassionate attention is being paid to their actual life situation.⁴

In the traditional Christian liturgy, the *locus classicus* for the (mental) inclusion of all the plights plaguing people is the *Kyrie eleison* immediately before the *Gloria*. It offers participants a chance to take at least a short look on the darker side of their life and to bring it before God.⁵ Unfortunately, this moment of lament seems to be a rather short episode in the course of worship – even though it is supplemented by a prayer of intercession later in the liturgy.⁶ The place where burdened people can best be assured that their life situation is not overlooked by the Christian Church is in the sermon as

an integral part of worship,⁷ because the sermon is the most extensive part of the entire worship service.⁸ It provides the necessary room to reflect on the contextual realities of vulnerability under which the participants are suffering. Whenever the situation or the text calls for such specifics, the sermon is the right place to give voice to these calamities. Suffering, of course, is not the sole theme of sermons, but relevant sermons are the natural place to cast woe in words, whenever the context gives cause for lament. The very fact that numerous biblical texts answer to contextual needs invites the praxis of making human vulnerability the subject matter of preaching whenever the opportunity arises.

3. Contextual needs and the Western European challenge of an aging society

In different contexts different needs arise. From continent to continent, country to country, and time to time the vulnerability of human existence will show a different face. Even in Europe manifold difficulties like crime, poverty, exploitation, trafficking of human beings and injustice prevail. Compared with other parts of the world Western European countries allow most people to live in socially relatively comfortable situations. But against the backdrop of an affluent context, individual experiences of setbacks and suffering may be felt even more severely. And even in prospering societies life is vulnerable and specific challenges exist.

One challenge which needs to be addressed is the aging of the Western European societies with all the problems and chances this poses to the individual as well as to the public. Whereas in large parts of the world the population is still growing rapidly, birth rates are up and young people abound, the population in Europe will shrink at least until the middle of the century.⁹ In Germany, the country with the lowest birth rate in the European Union today, a process started about fifty years ago in which fewer children are being born than are needed to keep the population stable.¹⁰ This process is irreversible since invariably fewer babies are born due to the fact that for the last four decades each parent generation is only one-third of the size of the previous generation. As a consequence, the German population will be shrinking from 80.8 million in 2013 to between 67.6 and 73.1 million in 2060.¹¹ Children and young people have been becoming rare spe-

cies in the country.

Connected with this development, the aging of the German society has begun. Between now and 2030 the exceptionally large age-groups of the 'baby boomers' and 'baby busters', which were born in the years between 1950 and 1964, successively will reach retirement age. Due to the improved conditions in medicine, nutrition, hygiene and work, the prospects are also that they will grow much older than earlier generations. The life-expectancy of new-borns in Germany has increased by 63% during the last century. In 1910-1911 new-born males had a life-expectancy of 47.4 years; by 2010 it was 77.5 years; and by the year 2060 the life-expectancy of males will average 87.7 years. Females in 1910-1911 had a life-expectancy of 50.7 years; by 2010 it was 82.6 years; while by the year 2060 the life-expectancy of females will average 91.2 years.¹² High and very high age will become normal – with consequences for health and social life which will need to be discussed. In the first half of the twenty-first century the percentage of people aged over 60 years will rise from 21.8% (17.9 million) to 40.9% (27.8 million) of the total population. The quota of seniors over 80 years old will even triple by 2050 from 3.7% (3.0 million) now to 14.7% (10 million).¹³

In other European countries the numbers will obviously differ but the trends are likely to be similar in many countries, even if the developments are slower. For Practical Theology it is a necessity to observe these developments in society in order to see what are the specific needs of the people and the resulting consequences for the Church.¹⁴

4. Life-situations and needs arising in an aging society

Different authors set the beginning of old age differently: 40, 55, 60 and 65 years of age have been suggested.¹⁵ Considering the continuing improvement of the health-situation and life-expectancy of seniors, it seems reasonable not to let old age begin before the official retirement age. It can be said that four ages characterise the human life span: the first age is that of childhood; the second age is that of employed adulthood; *the third age* begins with retirement around 65;¹⁶ and *the fourth age* begins about one-and-a-half decades later, around 80, whenever vitality, mobility and health start to diminish markedly.¹⁷ People in their third age are the 'young seniors'; 'seniors of high age' are those living in their fourth age.¹⁸ Vulnerability

accompanies all life stages, but in old age specific burdens naturally will increase.¹⁹

4.1 The younger seniors

Especially in the third age different aspects of a senior's life need to be distinguished. Potential vulnerabilities of younger seniors are:

1. *Loss of significance.* After leaving their professional position many older people now experience the lack of status which they enjoyed during their career. They suddenly feel treated as elderly, incompetent people, at times even being discharged as unfit for real life.

2. *Loss of signification.* A retired person may ask: What am I there for? Do I still have anything to offer that is needed? What is my purpose in the years ahead?

3. *Loss of contacts.* Young seniors may grow lonely. The daily contacts which they had whilst working are gone. Children are not there or have left home long ago. Moreover, many in Western European societies never had any children or grandchildren and are now missing them. And even if they have their kin, today's small multi-local and busy families of different generations (with perhaps one child per generation, dispersed over quite different parts of the country or even the world) often lack personal contact, being linked only by electronic media. Loneliness emerges and the question may arise: for whom have I accumulated all these material possessions during my ever busy professional career which left little room for private life and personal offspring?

But there is also still the bright side of life. In the 'third age' the younger seniors will normally be rather vital, enterprising and competent in view of their life experience and professional expertise.²⁰ Many will experience this new phase of life as a time of 'late freedom' which opens up opportunities to fulfil life-long dreams. If young seniors are in good health – as many are – they will most likely feel younger than they actually are. In polls seniors on average declare that their felt age is some 5.5 years younger than their chronological age – and those seniors who consider their health to be good or very good even feel 8 years younger than they actually are.²¹

Of today's seniors 80% state the intention to use their late freedom mainly to support their children and grandchildren, while so far only 34% think that seniors will also be ready to help others in need in society.²² On the other hand, if

young seniors find new challenges which match their needs for independence, social function and purpose, a growing number might take them up. There is an increasing body of literature regarding a great variety of examples of such civic engagement by active men and women in their third age:²³ Third-agers are active helping young people to successfully master school and enter professional life; they assist other older seniors, who are financially unable to hire professional assistance, to cope with life; and in years ahead their dedicated input will be needed even more, when (around the middle of this century) 50% of the population in their employed adulthood will have to finance the other half of the nation, which will consist of 16% children and youth below 20 years of age and 34% of seniors and highly aged people. At that moment the double challenge will be to support the middle generation as well as the seniors of high age. For without volunteer service no one will be able to finance the social costs of an aging society, while those in employment will have to pay such high social contributions that in most cases both the man and the woman in a household will have to work, putting them in need of support in case they also want (and need) to raise children. And not only society at large, but the Church will also need the input of vital and competent young seniors who act as volunteers in churches which will be smaller, poorer and staffed with far fewer full-time employees than today.²⁴

4.2 People in the 'fourth age'

In the 'fourth age' the situation of seniors will most likely change. The circles of life will seem to narrow down. Octogenarians often experience increasing vulnerability causing them weakness and suffering. These may include:

1. The gradual or sudden *loss of health*: the decrease of vitality and strength; or disability because of physical handicaps; or even disablement due to mental degeneration.
2. In consequence, seniors of high age may suffer a *loss of autonomy*: Their mobility abates. Gradually they become dependent on help from others, be it family or professional caretakers.
3. As years go by, seniors of high age successively suffer a *loss of companions*: lack of mobility and hardness of hearing impair social life; old friends and relatives die; the marriage partner (if any) also has to be relinquished. The higher the age, the rarer meaningful contacts normally are.

4. Finally, any aged persons have to cope with the inevitability of the *loss of their own life*. People may like it or not, but they have to rise to the challenge that their life is finite. This is the ultimate vulnerability of human existence.

Christian worship and preaching has to do justice to these different aspects of reality in older age. And Christian answers to those challenges have to be more differentiated than they used to be in the past, when churches one-sidedly tended to see seniors only from the perspective of their needs, deficits and losses, rather than in light of their potential.²⁵

5. Aging as a challenge for Church, worship and preaching

For the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD – Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland) the problem of aging is even more pressing than for the rest of German society. There are fewer church members in their middle age than in society, fewer young adults, and more people of higher age.²⁶ The prospects for German Protestantism are that by the year 2030 no less than 40% of church members will be beyond 60 years of age – a proportion which will only be reached in Germany as a whole some 30 years later.²⁷ So the Church is challenged to concentrate on the needs of an increasingly numerous generation of seniors even earlier than others.

5.1 Reaching the aged by means of service and sermon

The fact that the church has disproportionately many members close to or beyond retirement age, does not automatically mean that it actually reaches them with its programmes. Even though 55% of respondents who indicated in a poll that they attend church almost weekly are older than 60,²⁸ and even though the majority of churchgoers are females over 45 years old,²⁹ the prospects are that the upcoming generations of seniors, which have grown up with only limited connections to the church, will not automatically grow religious in higher age.³⁰ Without missionary enterprises the church is likely to lose the older generations of the future.

The challenge will be to reach people who are advanced in life by such means that they find their way to church. Practically this means making contacts, making seniors feel welcome and developing

a variety of programmes to offer younger seniors meaningful opportunities to invest themselves, and to give older seniors opportunities to have their needs met. It also means that churches have to design integrative church services where different generations mingle, so that seniors are not isolated among themselves but are taken into the promising fellowship of worshippers which consists of people of all ages, with music and liturgical forms which are acceptable to a broad variety of participants.³¹ This is vital for a generation which decades ago revolutionised popular culture and which will still feel young even in old age,³² but which at the same time is missing the laughter of children and grandchildren because there are so few around.³³ Such integrative church services will need to be hospitable: places where seniors feel welcome and honoured and where their needs are cared for – even physical needs like comfortable seating, good sight, access to ear-phones and barrier-free sanitary facilities. Hospitality for seniors might also mean the replacement of the last rows of pews in the sanctuary with a placid church café in order to meet the needs of the elderly for fellowship and leisure. Integrative services will also contain sermons which address the needs and potential of the different participants, so that over time each single group will feel respected and the mutual understanding of all participants will grow.

By its programmes the Church can make an essential contribution to the general wellbeing of people in their third and fourth ages: the experience of good fellowship combined with meaningful tasks and the confidence and comfort of religious belief could be very effective in this respect. Peter Marti has demonstrated this convincingly in his qualitative research into older people.³⁴

5.2 Sermons for young seniors: challenges to diaconal activities

Sermons offer an opportunity to speak to the life situation and needs of younger seniors. As people in their 'third age' between retirement and high age, they live in a delicate balance between late freedom, new opportunities and comparatively high vitality on the one side, and noticeable losses of significance, signification and contacts after the end of their professional life on the other side. Relevant preaching will understand this balance and cast it in appropriate words:

- Relevant preaching will show understanding of what it means to leave behind a life task which has consumed most of one's

time and energy for decades, laying it into the hands of others – and to be replaced and perhaps forgotten. Biblical wisdom knows about this problem of vanity (Eccl 1:2-4, 9-10), but it also knows that with God nothing humans have done will be forgotten (Eccl 3:15).

- Relevant preaching will portray young seniors not just as old people in need of care, but as competent persons with resources of time, experience and the potential to help others.³⁵ The biblical narratives abound with stories of seniors who seem to have entered their best years and to have started important tasks.
- In consequence, relevant preaching will instigate today's vital young seniors to use their newly-won freedom to invest their potential wherever help is needed. There have been apparently contrasting theories about fulfilment in seniority: the '*disengagement theory*' (by Cumming and Henry) which argues that happiness in older age lies in being free of all duties and demands; and the '*activity theory*' (by Havighurst and Albrecht) which holds that contentment can only be reached by being mentally, physically and socially active.³⁶ In fact, these theories can be seen as complementary. To be free from certain things means to be free for other things. Relevant preaching will emphasise this and motivate young seniors to invest their potential without overstressing themselves.
- Relevant preaching also will cast visions of how Christian programmes and projects for seniors might look in the future. Surely, there is nothing to criticise regarding a seniors' fellowship in church every fortnight offering coffee and cake after a friendly welcome by the pastor. In fact this might be a good opportunity for contacts and sharing. But this is not sufficient for a seniors' ministry in the years ahead. In an aging society with growing needs, vital young seniors with their competences and desires for purpose and meaning want to be motivated and offered opportunities to engage themselves in projects which are limited in time and charitable in scope. For instance, to invest the competency of one's former professional life in helping deprived young people to prepare for a job; or to offer time

to help mothers and fathers to care for their children for a few hours every week; or to spend part of an afternoon with old people who are suffering from dementia and to assist seniors of high age at specific times to cope with everyday life. In secular society these opportunities for civic engagement are increasingly gaining attention.³⁷ Relevant preaching which uses such examples of civic and diaconal engagement will motivate younger seniors to find purpose and meaningful contacts in altruistic projects pursued together with others for the benefit of people in need.

- Relevant preaching which acknowledges what men and women of a senior age are accomplishing will enhance the dignity of senior people in the eyes of younger people who are present in worship.³⁸ They will start to see the potential and the competency of retired people more clearly, and at the same time catch a vision of the dignity and beauty of the diaconal engagement of individuals.
- Relevant preaching instigating selfless action will be part of the diaconal ministry of the Church in society by encouraging further social engagement and active citizenship.³⁹ It will also serve to explain the motivation behind our Christian diaconal engagement. It may be true that caring for people in need is not exclusively a Christian activity, but generally human.⁴⁰ Still, throughout the history of diaconal service Christian values have truly enhanced the social engagement for people in need.⁴¹ Christian anthropological convictions like human dignity, the value of each individual no matter how old or able, as well as Christian motives like altruistic love and impartial justice have often resulted in an attitude of care for people in need, no matter who they are. But since social action in itself will always remain ambiguous concerning its motivation and purpose, diaconal ministries need to be accompanied by the church's kerygmatic ministry.⁴² Preaching, in turn, will promote Christian values which lead to unselfish acts of love and justice, which testify to a God who cares in the midst of an all-too-often inhumane society. So, motivation, identification and witness are the essential aspects of

preaching in the context of diaconal deeds of love and justice.

5.3 Sermons for seniors of high age: messages of dignity, comfort and hope

Integrative services will also address the vulnerabilities which threaten seniors of high age. Within such services the sermon presents ample opportunities to meet the needs of seniors in their fourth age and to bring them messages of comfort and hope. As indicated above, people over 80 years of age have to face the loss of health, loss of autonomy, loss of companions and finally the end of life. Christian preaching has to be relevant for an elderly generation which eventually faces these deprivations. Whether seniors of high age are still able to attend church and to participate in worship, whether they can listen from a distance, or whether the church will need to come to their home or sickbed by sending visitors who bring along a recording of the latest service and sermon, the elderly still will remain part of the community.

- Relevant preaching will empathetically voice understanding of what it means to experience the continually narrowing circles of older life. In so doing it gives comfort, based on the awareness of the invariable truth of the biblical wisdom that at the end the evil days will come of which people will say, 'I have no delight in them' (Eccl 11:8-12:1), when eye-sight, mental outlook, bodily strength and eventually life as such will diminish, leaving the dire perspective that 'the dust will return to the earth as it was' (Eccl. 12:2-7a). Caring realism will give people in this phase of life the assurance of being understood.
- Relevant preaching, moreover, will convey a message of hope. Biblical wisdom confirms the hope that 'the Spirit will return to God who gave it!' (Eccl 12:7b). Ever since the Easter morning apostolic preaching is even more a message of faith and hope (cf. 1 Cor 15:20, 43-44). In consequence, relevant preaching does not only speak about the assets which alleviate actual life (cf. Mt 16:26), but it communicates the gospel which culminates in the saving message of cross and resurrection⁴³ as relevant for the actual life situation of seniors.
- In general, relevant preaching to people of high age starts from the conviction that religious faith will be an asset for coping.⁴⁴

As several studies have shown, 'religious coping' is of significant help to master the life-tasks of old age.⁴⁵ Questions concerning human dignity and the worth of the person beyond their productive efficiency, questions concerning getting along with weakness, illness and loss, questions concerning the challenge to make peace with the imperfections of life and the need for forgiveness, and not least questions concerning the meaning of life and the basis of hope in view of decay and death – these all invite possible help of a spiritual nature. Learning to pray, finding a place within a loving religious community, experiencing edification through spiritual texts and songs, by means of religious symbols, religious reflection and pastoral counsel, as well as the grace of charity while serving others and being served in a caring community, all these things can be part of religious coping in the third and fourth ages of life.⁴⁶ Relevant preaching of the Gospel invites women and men into the fellowship of faith and opens up access to such assets for coping. Thus Christian proclamation can offer help and hope to people of senior age.

5.4 'Senior-sensitive homiletics' – preaching in an aging society

In the context of the aging societies of Western Europe the discipline of homiletics is challenged to think about homiletics for seniors, focusing on the special needs of a growing congregation of older people. At the levels of the so-called material and formal homiletics a number of issues will have to be considered. They have to do with biblical texts and their relevance, with reflection on the life-situation and the context of seniors, and with special requirements for those who preach to people of senior age.

- Senior homiletics, first of all, will have to be aware of the abundance of biblical texts which speak about old people and life-situations which are relevant to them.⁴⁷ Many texts speak about the competence, wisdom and ability of people in advanced age, and the blessings they convey: Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Samuel, Naomi or Simeon, as well as Hanna and John 'the elder' in the New Testament are examples which could and should be preached in an aging society.⁴⁸ The Bible is clear that seniority

is to be honoured⁴⁹ but it does not conceal the burdens and limitations of high age.⁵⁰ No wonder that it contains laments and prayers which ask God for his support in years of old age and which are answered by God's promises.⁵¹ At the same time these prayers are matched by texts which emphasise practical care for those in need.⁵²

- Senior homiletics, too, will be sensitive regarding the question of how any given text might relate to the multifaceted realities of the older generation, how it might be read (and felt) by them, and what it might mean to the different groups of younger and older seniors. Seniors attending worship services have to be reflected consciously in the preparation of homily and liturgy: What does this text mean for younger seniors? What about lonely or suffering individuals among the very elderly? How could this text encourage the mutual understanding between different generations? Which songs would reinforce well the message of the sermon for seniors or for those in the middle of their life?
- Furthermore, senior homiletics will spot the points of vulnerability for an older generation and become an advocate for their needs. It will reflect reality with a view to detect areas in which seniors can engage themselves and invest their strengths. Relevant sermons might address situations of injustice like a minimal pension in retirement for women who have raised children and worked hard during their whole life. They too might open up horizons of help that vital young seniors can offer to others in need of them, be they younger or older people. They also may motivate seniors of high age to share their life experience with a younger generation or to serve the Church and the world by praying for others.
- Senior homiletics, finally, has to reflect on formal issues which apply to sermons with older people in the audience. First, a pastoral aspect has to be considered: Seniors are often lonely. Before they are ready to listen to the preacher, they might want to meet him.⁵³ Being greeted personally on arrival, the opportunity to share some personal words, has a special significance for older attendants. Many of them have a lonely daily routine and some-

times a feeling of neglect, which may result in low self-confidence as being a person of not much use. A preacher who pays attention to the person will have a better chance to win an attentive listener.

Secondly, it is an indispensable act of love towards an elderly congregation that the preacher speaks slower, louder, more articulately and with more pronounced diction than he would need to do if he were only addressing younger people. Preachers without such clarity of speech are unfit for the demographic change which faces the church in Europe in the next decades. Preachers who perform the Word of God should not be inferior to actors who train hard to be able to perform in such a way that their audience will hear clearly and understand well.⁵⁴

Thirdly, the higher the age of the people in the congregation, the more essential it is for the preacher to speak in an elementary fashion, using narrative and avoiding abstract talk. Congregations who no longer are able to hear every single syllable or who already suffer from limited perceptive capabilities will thereby be able to better understand. And those who do not yet have any constraints of this sort will not have any problems with relevant biblical preaching presented in a lively, clear-cut and memorable manner. Jesus' own sermons could be examples of it.

6. Conclusion

The problems and chances of our aging societies in Western Europe have just begun to become visible. The challenges of these developments should not be ignored in our reflections on worship and sermon. On the one hand there is reason to be grateful for the fact that most people will reach a high age in good health. Especially in the so-called third age young seniors are still vital, enjoying the new freedom of the retirement-age with the opportunity to invest themselves in younger people or in seniors of high age who are in need of help. On the other hand younger seniors and seniors of high age have to face specific problems. In this situation, personal faith and religious practice prove to be helpful for coping. Integrative services offer hospitality to people of different generations, without neglecting the needs of seniors. Senior-

sensitive sermons take up the many encouraging texts of the Bible which speak into the situation of younger seniors and those of high age. In view of the challenges of our aging societies, homiletical training will have to pay special attention to training future pastors to speak slower, louder, more articulate and more clear-cut than they would to a younger audience. Senior-sensitive homiletics will be a major challenge for the next decades.

Dr. Helge Stadelmann is Professor of Practical Theology at the Freie Theologische Hochschule (FTH) Giessen, Germany, and at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit (ETF) Leuven, Belgium. His address is Rathenastr. 5-7, 35394 Giessen, Germany.

Endnotes

- 1 Timothy M. Pierce, *Enthroned on our Praise: An Old Testament theology of worship* (Nashville: B&H Publications, 2008) 248-249.
- 2 Samuel E. Balentine, 'Enthroned on the Praises and Laments of Israel' in Daniel L. Migliore (ed.), *The Lord's Prayer: Perspectives for reclaiming Christian prayer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 20-35; Walter C. Bouzard, *We Have Heard with our Ears, o God: Sources of the communal laments in the Psalms* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); Paul W. Ferris, *The Genre of Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The form and theology of biblical prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Federico G. Villanueva, *The 'Uncertainty of a Hearing': A study of the sudden change of mood in the Psalms of Lament* (SupplVT; Leiden: Brill, 2008); Claus Westermann, 'The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament', *Interpretation* 28 (1974) 20-38; Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).
- 3 Paul Bradbury, *Sowing in Tears: How to lament in a church of praise* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2007)
- 4 Cf. Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller (eds), *Lament: Reclaiming practices in pulpit, pew, and public square* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Lester Meyer, 'A Lack of Laments in the Church's Use of the Psalter', *Lutheran Quarterly* 7 (1993) 67-78; Léon van Ommen, *Human Tears, Divine Tears: A narrative analysis of Anglican liturgy in relation to stories of suffering people* (Diss. Leuven: Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, 2015).
- 4 The book of Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of lament and rebirth of hope* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999) can be

- considered an early example of scholarly liturgical interest in the topic of human fragility and lament in worship.
- 5 The Kyrie is not meant just to be a cry for forgiveness of sins (as sometimes is suggested by juxtaposition with the Confiteor and the assertion of grace), but it is thought to be a summary of all possible pleas for help, mercy and redemption humans may utter in the context of need; cf. Friedrich Kalb, *Grundriss der Liturgik*, 2nd rev. ed. (München: Evangelischer Presseverband, 1982) 119.
 - 6 In his research on Anglican liturgy and the comfort it offers to suffering people, Léon van Ommen has shown that the eucharist is also a place where in times of personal crisis believers feel close to God, who has suffered himself and compassionately comes close to his people; cf. Van Ommen, *Human Tears, Divine Tears*, 106-108, 134-135, 184-185, 189-191.
 - 7 The fact that some newer textbooks integrate homiletics into liturgical studies is to be acclaimed because it makes clear that the sermon is part of the liturgy; e.g. Peter Cornehl, *Der Evangelische Gottesdienst: Biblische Kontur und neuzeitliche Wirklichkeit*, Bd. 1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006) 13; Michael Meyer-Blanck, *Gottesdienstlehre* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 1-3.
 - 8 The normal Protestant sermon is about 20 minutes long, which is twice the duration of the normal Roman Catholic homily; cf. Meyer-Blanck, *Gottesdienstlehre*, 260. In Free Church services sermons may even be twice as long as in traditional Protestant worship; cf. Helge Stadelmann, 'Predigtpraxis und Predigtverständnis in den Freikirchen', *Lebendige Seelsorge* 60 (2009) 55.
 - 9 See <https://www.dsw.org/landerdatenbank/> [accessed 12/07/17].
 - 10 In 1964 still 1.36 million babies were born each year in Germany, about twice the number of today (673.000). The German birthrate of 8.2 newborns per 1.000 inhabitants is the lowest in Europe (the European average is 10.9 newborns). With only 1.3 children per woman Germany belongs to the small circle of countries with the lowest birthrate worldwide. (2.1 children per woman are needed for some growth of population.)
 - 11 Figures according to the 13th coordinated forecast of population by the Statistisches Bundesamt in Wiesbaden, see https://www.destatis.de/DE/Publikationen/Thematisch/Bevoelkerung/VorausberechnungBevoelkerung/evoelkerung-Deutschland2060Presse5124204159004.pdf?__blob=publicationFile, 15 [accessed 06/04/2018]. Cf. Herwig Birg, *Die demographische Zeitenwende: Der Bevölkerungsrückgang in Deutschland und Europa* (München: Beck, 2001) 98.
 - 12 Statistisches Bundesamt, *Bevölkerung Deutschlands bis 2060: 12. Koordinierte Bevölkerungsvorausberechnung. Begleitmaterial zur Pressekonferenz am 18. November 2009 in Berlin* (Wiesbaden: destatis, 2009) 30; cf. also the graph derived from the 13. *Koordinierte Bevölkerungsvorausberechnung*, Wiesbaden 2015, at <https://www.destatis.de/bevoelkerungspyramide/> [accessed 12/07/2017] and the graphs in Petra-Angela Ahrens, 'Alt ist man erst ab achtzig: Erkenntnisse aus der Alter(n)sforschung', in Traugott Jähnichen u.a. (Hrsg.), *Alternde Gesellschaft*, Jahrbuch Sozialer Protestantismus 6 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2013) 16-17.
 - 13 Herwig Birg, *Trends der Bevölkerungsentwicklung* (Frankfurt: Fritz Knapp, 2000) 29-30; similarly, Frank Schirrmacher, *Das Methusalem-Komplott* (4. Auflage; München: Karl Blessing, 2005) 42-43; Peter Schimany, *Die Alterung der Gesellschaft: Ursachen und Folgen des demographischen Umbruchs* (Frankfurt / New York: Campus, 2003).
 - 14 Helge Stadelmann, 'Demographie und die Zukunft des Gemeindebaus: Perspektiven für die erste Hälfte des 21. Jahrhunderts', *Jahrbuch für evangelikale Theologie* 20 (2006) 7-23; and Helge Stadelmann und Stefan Schweyer, *Praktische Theologie: Ein Grundriss für Studium und Gemeinde* (Gießen: Brunnen, 2017) 118-133. For the political and social consequences, see Herwig Birg, *Die Alternde Republik und das Versagen der Politik: Eine demographische Prognose* (Berlin: LIT, 2015).
 - 15 Cf. Timo Jahnke, *In Würde Altern und Alt sein: Praktisch-Theologische Bausteine zu einem würdevollen Alterungsprozess im Kirchen- und Gemeindekontext* (Praktische Theologie Interdisziplinär 5; Berlin: Lit, 2014) 18-22.
 - 16 Birg, *Trends der Bevölkerungsentwicklung*, 29; Heiko Hörnicke, *Aufbruch im dritten Lebensalter* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld, 2006) 10-12; Stefan Pohlmann, *Das Altern der Gesellschaft als globale Herausforderung: Deutsche Impulse* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001) 46.
 - 17 Birg, *Trends der Bevölkerungsentwicklung*, 29; Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, *Vierter Bericht zur Lage der älteren Generation in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Risiken, Lebensqualität und Versorgung Hochaltriger – unter besonderer Berücksichtigung demenzieller Erkrankungen* (Bonn: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2002) 60-62; Deutscher Bundestag, *Enquete-Kommission Demographischer Wandel: Herausforderungen unserer älter werdenden Gesellschaft an den Einzelnen und die Politik* (Berlin: Deutscher Bundestag, 2002) 55; Schimany, *Die Alterung der Gesellschaft*, 388.
 - 18 Cf. Ahrens, 'Alt ist man erst ab achtzig', 14, for the distinction between young seniors and seniors of high age.
 - 19 According to the study by the EKD (Evangelischen

- Kirche in Deutschland, German Protestant Church), *Im Alter neu werden können: Evangelische Perspektiven für Individuum, Gesellschaft und Kirche: Eine Orientierungshilfe des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2009) 15-16.
- 20 Karl Foitzik, 'Kompetenzen und Engagement älterer Menschen: Ressourcen für Kirche und Gemeinden', *Praktische Theologie* 41 (2006) 280.
- 21 Ahrens, 'Alt ist man erst ab achtzig', 22. Those who judge their health to be poor or very poor still declare their felt age to be 2,5 years below their chronological age. From about 80 years of age onwards, the felt age and the actual age tend to coincide.
- 22 Ahrens, 'Alt ist man erst ab achtzig', 30.
- 23 Cf. Herbert Henzler und Lothar Späth, *Der Generationen-Pakt: Warum die Alten nicht das Problem, sondern die Lösung sind* (München: Carl Hanser, 2011); Roland Krüger und Loring Sittler, *Wir brauchen Euch! Wie sich die Generation 50Plus engagieren und verwirklichen kann* (Hamburg: Murmann, 2011); Dieter Otten, *Die 50+ Studie: Wie die jungen Alten die Gesellschaft revolutionieren* [2008] (2. Auflage; Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2009); Henning Scherf und Uta von Schrenk, *Altersreise: Wie wir altern wollen* (Freiburg / Basel / Wien: Herder, 2013).
- 24 Kristin Bergmann, 'Die Zukunft der alternden Kirche' in Traugott Jähnichen et al. (Hrsg.), *Alternde Gesellschaft*, Jahrbuch Sozialer Protestantismus 6 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2013) 276-277: 'Aufgrund veränderter Rahmenbedingungen wird die Kirche der Zukunft nicht nur älter, sondern auch kleiner und ärmer an Geld und an hauptamtlichem Personal sein. Um nah an den Menschen zu bleiben, braucht sie mehr denn je Menschen, die bereit sind, sich einzubringen, die das kirchliche Leben (mit) gestalten und das Evangelium unter die Leute bringen.'
- 25 Bergmann, 'Zukunft der alternden Kirche', 276. Ahrens, 'Alt ist man erst ab achtzig', 40, offers the following summary of her survey: 'Die positive Anknüpfung der Religiosität an aktive Orientierungen belegt, dass es sich lohnt, die in vielen Handlungsfeldern immer noch vorherrschende defizitäre, fürsorgliche Perspektive auf die Alten stärker durch eine auf deren Kompetenzen und Interessen abstellende Sicht zu ergänzen, zumal der Einsatz für die Schwachen eben auch Starke braucht.'
- 26 Thorsten Latzel, 'Mitgliedschaft' in Jan Hermelink und Thorsten Latzel (Hrsg.), *Kirche empirisch: Ein Werkbuch* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2008) 19, commenting on a comparative graph: 'Am Vergleich des Altersaufbaus in der Bevölkerung insgesamt (außen) und in der evangelischen Kirche (innen) lässt sich ablesen, dass die Kirchenmitgliedschaft bereits jetzt massiv „überaltert“ oder besser „unterjüngt“ ist ..., dass in ihr vor allem der „Bauch“ der mittleren Jahrgänge fehlt.'
- 27 Bergmann, 'Zukunft der alternden Kirche', 271; on page 273: 'Ältere, insbesondere Frauen, sind unter den Kirchenmitgliedern überdurchschnittlich vertreten.'
- 28 Bergmann, 'Zukunft der alternden Kirche', 273.
- 29 Ingrid Lukatis, 'Der ganz normale Gottesdienst in empirischer Sicht', *Praktische Theologie* 35 (2003) 255-268; Friedrich Schweitzer, 'Gottesdienst auf dem Prüfstand: Empirische Befunde – offene Fragen – Herausforderungen für die Zukunft' in Hans-Joachim Eckstein, Ulrich Heckel und Birgit Weyel (Hrsg.), *Kompodium Gottesdienst* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 289-291, 301.
- 30 For the future it is doubtful whether in the next generation older people will automatically also be more religious and church-related; cf. Michael N. Ebertz, 'Je älter, desto frömmer?' in *Religionsmonitor 2008*, ed. BertelsmannStiftung (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2007) 54-62; Petra-Angela Ahrens, *Uns geht's gut. Generation 60plus: Religiosität und kirchliche Bindung* (Berlin / Münster: LIT, 2011) 5, 111; Bergmann, 'Zukunft der alternden Kirche', 273-275. – Without missionary efforts the church might lose the seniors of tomorrow.
- 31 Cf. Helge Stadelmann, 'Praise & Worship: Christliche Populärmusik im Gottesdienst' in Stefan Schweyer (Hrsg.), *Freie Gottesdienste zwischen Liturgie und Event* (Wien / Berlin: LIT, 2012) 34-36; and Stadelmann und Schweyer, *Praktische Theologie*, 212-218.
- 32 See paragraph 4.1 above.
- 33 Schirrmacher, *Methusalem-Komplott*, 16-17, 69-71.
- 34 Peter Marti, *Das Zusammenspiel von Wohlbefinden und Lebenssinn in der Entwicklung zum Alter: Eine praktisch-theologische Studie* (Wien: LIT, 2014).
- 35 The EKD study *Im Alter neu werden können*, 28, rightly emphasizes that the longer life expectancy and the increased vitality of senior people will have the consequence that mere caring and entertaining work with seniors in churches will reach its limits.
- 36 James Gollnick, *Religion and Spirituality in the Life Cycle* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005) 207-209; David O. Moberg, 'Spirituality in Gerontological Theories' in D.O. Moberg (ed.), *Aging and Spirituality: Spiritual Dimensions of Aging Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* (Binghamton: Haworth Pastoral, 2001) 35.
- 37 See, e.g., Bertelsmann-Stiftung, *Das vielfältige Engagement älterer Menschen als gesellschaftliche Ressource erkennen: Empfehlungen der Expertenkommission „Ziele der Altenpolitik“* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007); see also the literature referred to in note 23.
- 38 EKD study *Im Alter neu werden können*, 53.
- 39 Latzel, 'Mitgliedschaft', 31: 'So wächst den Gemeinden und der Kirche etwa im Blick auf die

- demographische Entwicklung eine besondere gesamtgesellschaftliche Aufgabe zu, da sie immer schon mit Fragen des Alters und Alterns befasst sind und intergenerationell arbeiten.' – According to the (fourth) EKD church poll of 2006 the expectation that the church cares for old people, the sick and the disabled ranks highest in a list of fourteen different expectations, among church-members as well as non-church-members; see Wolfgang Huber, Johannes Friedrich und Peter Steinacker (Hrsg.), *Kirche in der Vielfalt der Lebensbezüge: Die vierte EKD-Erhebung über Kirchenmitgliedschaft* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006) 457. – For an overview see Georg-Hinrich Hammer, *Geschichte der Diakonie in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2013) *passim*.
- 40 Johannes Eurich, 'Glaubensbildung als Instrument für Mitarbeiterschulungen in diakonischen Einrichtungen' in Johannes Eurich und Wolfgang Maaser (Hrsg.), *Diakonie in der Sozialökonomie: Studien zu Folgen der neuen Wohlfahrtspolitik* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013) 195-196.
- 41 Even in times of increasing economic pressure on institutions of social welfare, diaconic enterprises will remain determined to serve their neighbours with actions which are motivated by love and justice. See Wolfgang Maaser, 'Öffentliche Diakonie im Spannungsfeld von Kirche und Gesellschaft' in Eurich, *Diakonie in der Sozialökonomie*, 51.
- 42 Eurich, 'Glaubensbildung als Instrument', 196: 'Die Zweideutigkeit helfenden Handelns bedingt nun aber, dass dieses um eine explizite, „verkündigende“ und „hinweisende“ Dimension ergänzt werden muss. Denn wenn Diakonie es gänzlich versäumt, Auskunft über den Glauben zu geben, dann bleibt diakonisches Handeln in eben dieser Zweideutigkeit stecken, dann ist diakonisches Handeln nicht als Beitrag der christlichen Kirchen zur Gestaltung einer humanen Gesellschaft erkennbar. Das bedeutet: Ohne Worte geht es nicht. Zur stummen Tat muss das christliche Wort-Zeugnis hinzu treten.'
- 43 In his significant textbook *Praktische Theologie* (Berlin / New York: de Gruyter, 2012), Christian Grethlein has identified the central task of Practical Theology to be the 'communication of the Gospel', which has to be done in the modes of 'teaching and learning' (254-277), 'communal celebration' (278-299) and 'help for living' (300-323). Unfortunately his understanding of the Gospel to be taught, celebrated and applied in helpful acts is determined only by the words and deeds of the earthly Jesus and stops short of the central events of cross and resurrection, thus being underrated in theological respect.
- 44 Ahrens, 'Alt ist man erst ab achtzig', 37, concludes from a comprehensive poll: 'Religiosität trägt zudem zu einer größeren Lebenszufriedenheit bei.' This conclusion is confirmed by Marti, *Zusammenspiel von Wohlbefinden und Lebenssinn*, 232-234, who also indicates that intrinsic religiosity motivates even older people to care not only for themselves but for others as well.
- 45 Gollnick, *Religion and Spirituality*; Harold Koenig, *Aging and God: Spiritual Pathways to Mental Health in Midlife and Later Years* (New York: Haworth, 1994); Harold Koenig, 'Religion and Health in Later Life' in Melvin A. Kimble, Susan H. McFadden *et al.* (eds), *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 9-29; Susan H. McFadden, 'Commentary: Religious Coping in Later Life' in K. Warner Schaie, Neal Krause *et al.* (eds), *Religious Influences on Health and Well-Being in the Elderly* (New York: Springer, 2004) 141-151. – These studies understand 'religion' as a lively intrinsic faith and not as an extrinsic set of life-restricting rules or even a fear-inducing notion of God. The difference between intrinsic and extrinsic faith and its relevance for religious coping is also emphasised in Annette Dörr, *Religiosität und Depression: Eine empirisch-psychologische Untersuchung* (Weinheim: Deutscher Studienverlag, 1987) and in Annette Dörr, *Religiosität und psychische Gesundheit: Zusammenhangsstruktur spezifischer religiöser Konzepte* (Hamburg: Kovac, 2001).
- 46 Jahnke, *In Würde Altern und Alt Sein*, 58-63.
- 47 Cf. Jahnke, *In Würde Altern und alt sein*, 142-189.
- 48 See Gen 12:4; Ex 7:7; Deut 34:7; Jos 13:1; 14:6-15; 1 Sam 7:15 [cf. 8:5-6; 16:1-7]; Ruth 4:14-16; Lk 2:25-35; 2:36-38; Rev 1:9-10 // Gen 27:27-29; 48:1-49:33; Deut 33:1-3.
- 49 See Ex 20:12; Lev 19:32; Prov 16:31; cf. Lam 5:12; Mic 7:6; Mk 7:8-10.
- 50 Gen 18:11-13; 48:10; 2 Sam 19:36; 1 Kings 1:1; Eccl 12:2-5.
- 51 Ps 71:9, 18; Is 46:4.
- 52 Deut 10:17-29; Mt 25:34-46; Lk 10:25-37; Acts 6:1-7; Gal 6:9-11; 1 Tim 5:3-11; Jas 1:27 and 2:12-14.
- 53 The masculine pronoun here reflects my conviction that preaching in public worship is a ministry for men only. This is not the view of the editors of this Journal.
- 54 Jana Childers, *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 57-59.